



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

SEP - 8 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
DEPUTY CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER
chiefs of the MILITARY SERVICES
CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR LEGISLATIVE
AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC
AFFAIRS
DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES
DIRECTORS OF THE DOD FIELD ACTIVITIES

SUBJECT: Implementation of Department of Defense Survey Burden Action Plan – Reducing Survey Burden, Cost, and Duplication

In June, 2015, the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)) tasked the Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) with forming a “Tiger Team” to develop an Action Plan addressing the issues of survey burden and duplication across the Department. The ISSCC is comprised of representatives from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), the Defense Health Agency, and each of the Military Departments. Representatives from the Coast Guard and Washington Headquarters Services, as well as a liaison from the Secretary of Defense’s Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism Office, also collaborated on the Action Plan recommendations.

In December, 2015, the then-Acting USD(P&R) requested coordination and endorsement of a series of recommendations formulated in the Action Plan. With this extensive coordination now complete, I have approved the attached Action Plan.

Approved recommendations include:

- Establishing consistent standards that apply to Department of Defense (DoD) and Military Department surveys;
- Mandating fewer surveys, less frequent administration of recurring surveys, fewer questions per survey, and smaller sample sizes;

- Leveraging existing surveys and survey data as possible alternatives to new surveys;
- Reporting non-compliance of unapproved surveys;
- Enhancing coordination with DoD funding organizations prior to new survey efforts;
- Establishing a centralized repository and calendar containing officially approved surveys and their planned fielding schedules.

This Action Plan represents only the beginning of a strategy to improve the effectiveness of DoD surveys. The ISSCC will continue to identify efficiencies that improve the capabilities of our Survey programs, ensuring that Service members and their families continue to be heard, while reducing the burden on them and cost to the Department. I have also asked the ISSCC to provide an implementation update by December 1, 2016. My point of contact is Dr. Paul Rosenfeld, DMDC, 571-372-0987, Paul.Rosenfeld.civ@mail.mil.



Peter Levine
Acting

Attachment:
As stated

DOD SURVEY BURDEN

TIGER TEAM ACTION PLAN



Department of Defense
Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) – Tiger Team
DoD Survey Burden Action Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) was established in the 1990s to better facilitate survey and focus group (referred to henceforth as “surveys”) coordination across the Department of Defense (DoD). According to DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1100.13, *DoD Surveys*, ISSCC membership consists of representatives from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), survey groups from each of the Military Services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force), and the Defense Health Agency (DHA). The ISSCC is chaired by DMDC.

While survey burden, cost, and duplication have previously been issues of concern for the ISSCC, they have become more urgent in recent years as burden and costs have increased and response rates have decreased. With the increased burden being placed on military members and their families to respond to surveys, as well as the costs to the Department to conduct them, DoD surveys are facing a crisis. The following are reasons why DoD and Military Department surveys have become more difficult and expensive to conduct:

- Average response rates on DoD surveys have decreased approximately 15 percentage points since 2005, from ~35% to ~20% (or lower). Low response rates may reduce data quality and increase the risk that opinions from a small subset of members are not representative of the DoD population. They also increase cost and burden as more members need to be surveyed to obtain the required number of responses.
- A number of single- and multi-Component surveys across the DoD continue to be administered outside of the regulatory process, which add cost and burden and may duplicate existing licensed survey collections.
- Unit and command surveys are often unregulated, and therefore the number of these surveys is unknown, and their impact on military members is difficult to assess.
- Multiple surveys with large sample sizes of the same populations are being administered to obtain feedback on the same topics (e.g., sexual assault, well-being, retention). This duplication of effort results in many military members and DoD civilians, as well as their families, receiving multiple surveys a year, with some requesting the same information.
- DoD and Military Department guidance is inconsistent and should be updated to help improve survey governance, including review, approval, licensing, and tracking.

To address these concerns, the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD[P&R]) tasked the ISSCC to establish a Survey Burden Tiger Team in June 2015. The purpose of the team was to develop an Action Plan to address survey burden, cost, and duplication, with recommendations to support a more cohesive survey data collection program that benefits DoD and the Military Departments. This team was composed of ISSCC members, as well as a survey representative from the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and staff from the Washington Headquarters Services (WHS). In addition, a liaison from RADM Margaret DeLuca Klein’s staff also collaborated with the Tiger Team. RADM Klein, the Secretary of Defense’s Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism (SAMP), had been an early proponent of the team’s effort to identify and address issues related to survey burden, cost, and duplication across the Department.

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The Tiger Team met weekly via remote phone conference, and held two on-site meetings at the Mark Center in Alexandria, VA in June and August, 2015. Issues were extensively discussed, recommendations were formalized and voted on, and unanimous agreement was reached on a wide range of recommendations including:

- Establish consistent standards that apply to DoD and Military Department surveys.
- Reduce burden, cost, and duplication through less frequent surveys, shorter questionnaires, and surveys sent to random samples rather than entire populations.
- Leverage existing DoD and Military Department survey data already collected rather than duplicating efforts among multiple DoD survey programs.
- Empower the existing ISSCC-member Survey Offices from DMDC, DHA, and each of the Military Departments as the screening gateways for applicable DoD and Military Department surveys of a single Component¹ with: 1) more than 100 DoD members or their families per year; or 2) vulnerable populations (e.g., minors); or 3) sensitive topics (e.g., gender relations, discrimination, UCMJ violations) to improve tracking of survey burden.
- For surveys administered that are not in compliance with applicable DoD or Military Department policies, report the failure to comply with regulations to the USD(P&R) or applicable Military Department M&RA.
- Revise DoDI 8910.01, *Information Collection and Reporting*, DoD Manual 8910.01 – Volume 1, *DoD Information Collections Manual: Procedures for DoD Internal Information Collections*, DoD Manual 8910.01 – Volume 1, *DoD Information Collections Manual: Procedures for DoD Public Information Collections*, and DoDI 1100.13, *DoD Surveys*, to more clearly define review and approval requirements, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all applicable stakeholders, in the licensing of DoD and Military Department information collections defined as surveys.
- Conduct a feasibility study to develop an online survey panel of Active Duty and Reserve Component Members, as well as DoD Civilians, who agree to participate in selected surveys over a pre-determined time period. The panel would consist of members representing key demographics to ensure an accurate snapshot of the population.
- Draft a Department-wide letter, coordinated with DoD and Military Department leadership, to major funding organizations requesting advance coordination with the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office prior to award of DoD funding for research that includes surveys or focus groups.
- Conduct a DoD-wide proof of concept “one-survey solution” to design and administer a survey of military spouses across the Department using the existing Active Duty or Reserve Survey of Military Spouses that contains a core set of questions for all Military Departments and a limited set of tailored Military Department-specific questions.

¹ A single-Component survey is administered to only those within one Component (e.g., survey of Army only personnel). A multi-Component survey is administered to more than one Component (e.g., survey of Navy/Marine Corps and Air Force personnel).

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- Develop a centralized calendar and website containing officially approved surveys and their planned fielding schedules, including DoD and Military Department survey questionnaires, data tabulations, and reports. The website will serve as a repository of information and data collected by DoD and Military Department survey programs.
- Investigate feasibility and legality of the use of incentives for survey and focus group participants and standardize policy and allowable amounts across the Department.
- Research and pilot test the use of mobile survey technology for DoD and Military Department surveys.
- Request USD(P&R) Legislative Affairs Office notify the Director, DMDC when a survey or focus group is being considered in Congressional legislation to ensure it does not duplicate existing efforts. This notification will be shared with the Chair of the ISSCC and its members.
- Task and resource the Survey Burden Tiger Team as an ongoing effort of the ISSCC. The Tiger Team will provide regular updates to USD(P&R) and Military Department M&RAs on the effectiveness and efficiencies of recommendations implemented, as well as provide new recommendations for consideration.

The results of this collaborative effort are outlined in this document, and represent unanimous endorsement from each of the ISSCC member organizations.

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1 SURVEY STANDARDS

Recommendation

1.1	Establish consistent standards that apply to DoD and Military Department surveys.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Action Office(s): ISSCC			

Background

The Department's survey programs face a lack of consistency regarding methodologies and standards used to collect data. Due to developments in technology (i.e., email, Web, and online survey software), surveys are now easier to develop, causing some to mistakenly think anyone can be a "survey expert." However, a survey is not always the right mechanism to use when trying to address a problem, and if it is, careful consideration must be placed on using approved standards and tools. This includes industry-accepted methodologies, proven sampling methods, and regulated technology.

A key purpose of DoDI 1100.13 is to "provide guidance, information, and standards used during the review of survey requests." To support this goal, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), under the direction and authority of the USD(P&R), is responsible for developing "standards and procedures to be used in the review and approval recommendations of survey questionnaires, survey methods, and supporting survey materials." Currently, any multi-Component (e.g., Army and Navy) survey requiring review by DMDC must complete a survey supporting statement, which contains those guidelines and standards regarding survey content and methodology.

The ISSCC Tiger Team developed additional guidelines and standards outlined below and unanimously recommend that they apply to all DoD surveys. DMDC will add them to its survey supporting statement after this Action Plan is approved and will apply them to the multi-Component surveys it reviews under DoDI 8910.01 and DoDI 1100.13. The Tiger Team recommends that these standards should also apply to single-Component surveys currently reviewed by Military Department survey offices in accordance with their survey policies and regulations. Policy offices and survey applicants can request an exception to these standards if a written justification is approved by the applicable survey review office.

1. Establish a maximum number of questions for new single-Component surveys (100) and a maximum number of questions for new multi-Component surveys (200). The decision on how many response options allowed to be counted as a single question will be determined by the DoD/Military Department survey office as part of their review process.
 - Many DoD and Military Department surveys include too many questions that are burdensome to the respondent. Long surveys with too many questions lead to high costs, and unduly burden the DoD population and their families. These long surveys also lead to survey fatigue, and help contribute to low response rates.
2. Require a one-time, 10% reduction in questions on future administrations of recurring surveys.

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- Survey questions that are added to existing recurring surveys are often difficult to remove even when no longer needed. To reduce the length of existing recurring surveys, a one-time 10% reduction in questions on the next administration will be required. In addition, any addition of new questions on recurring surveys will need to be offset by elimination of a comparable number of questions.

3. Establish a maximum sample size of 50,000 for new surveys; surveys administered to more than one Component (e.g., active duty and Reserve, Army and Air Force) can include larger sample sizes to account for each Component. Additionally, allow existing/recurring surveys to include larger sample sizes to maintain consistency with their past collections. However, the ISSCC Tiger Team recommends modifying current census surveys that include entire populations to be statistical sample surveys.

- Many DoD and Military Department surveys include very large sample sizes (or even a census of DoD populations) that needlessly burden members and their families and waste money. The ISSCC highly discourages taking a census of large populations and encourages the use of statistical samples. In some instances, a census of smaller populations (e.g., military chaplains) is justifiable.
- Statistical sampling methods (i.e., random, probability-based samples):
 - Have been scientifically accepted to accurately represent a survey population.
 - Are recommended in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) survey guidelines and American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) best practices.
 - Are widely used by other government agencies (e.g., Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS]) and private survey organizations (e.g., Gallup, Pew, Westat).
- Statistical samples should strive for the minimum size required to meet study objectives. Currently, many survey groups are increasing samples sizes in order to obtain additional survey responses because of lower response rates. However, this approach will only increase survey burden and further continue the decline in response rates and data quality. Use of statistical sampling can mitigate some of this increased burden.

4. Limit the administration of ongoing DoD and Military Department surveys to once every two years or longer, unless required by law, mandated by policy, or directed by senior DoD or Military Department policymakers.

- The DoD and Military Departments have recognized that year-to-year survey results in many data series (e.g., retention, job satisfaction) change very little. The ISSCC Tiger Team believes that excessive survey burden caused by too many surveys is a reason for low response rates. This less frequent data collection for recurring surveys will reduce both costs and burden on military members and their families.

5. Establish a maximum number of eight (8) directed respondent communications; this includes any combination of postal, email, telephone, or other direct contact and reminders during a survey fielding period. General communications about a survey (e.g., newspaper article, public affairs communication) sent by policy offices or leadership to all members of their organizations are not typically considered part of this maximum allowable number.

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- While a larger number of contacts generally produce higher response rates from DoD and Military Department surveys, the effect is not linear; each additional contact increases response rates less than the previous attempt. Many DoD and Military Department surveys include too many communications that are of limited effectiveness and are burdensome to sample members who receive them. While the ISSCC Tiger Team supports the use of survey communications and reminders as a way of maximizing response rates, it recognizes the need to cap the number of these contacts at 8.
- Low response rates to DoD surveys cannot be solved by continuing to increase the number of survey contacts and reminders; this approach will further contribute to a decline in response rates and data quality.

6. Establish consistent, standard wording for demographic and other core survey items (e.g., retention).

- Survey questions that are asked differently across DoD may produce inconsistent results. DoD and Military Department surveys often develop different questions to capture the same concepts or are not formulated according to industry-accepted practice, which results in inconsistency and reduced comparability across surveys. Using standardized questions across the Department will improve comparability with external data and ensure the use of theoretically and empirically sound questions. The ISSCC will develop and publicize a set of standard demographic and other survey questions and highly encourage their use.

7. Standardize communication templates and web screens to include official survey information required of all approved DoD and Military Department surveys.

- With no standard DoD or Military Department communication template for surveys, potential respondents may be unsure if the survey they received is legitimate. Some members participate in unapproved surveys by mistake, and/or ignore legitimate surveys they do not recognize as official, thereby lowering participation in approved surveys. All approved surveys and supporting communications (e.g., letters, emails) should contain the following:
 - License or Survey Control Number
 - Expiration Date
 - Survey Point of Contact (POC) Information
- Web-based surveys should originate from a “.mil” address and emails should be digitally signed so intended recipients do not misinterpret the survey request as Spam or a Phishing attempt.

8. Require statistical weighting, where appropriate, for DoD and Military Department surveys.

- Response rates on DoD surveys vary for population subgroups. For example, E1-E3 response rates typically average less than 10% while O4-O6 response rates may average as high as 50%. Therefore, results may disproportionately reflect the opinions of senior members unless proper survey weighting is used. The purpose of survey weights is to ensure that each subgroup contributes to the final estimates in its correct proportion of the population. Statistical weighting of survey results is in accordance with federal survey

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guidelines as detailed in the *OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys* (2006).

9. Coordinate with DoD and Military Department Public Affairs Officers and sponsoring organizations for consistent reporting and use of survey results across DoD, and actions taken as a result of surveys.

- The ISSCC Tiger Team noted that much of the survey data collected by DoD and the Military Departments is not being used to evaluate programs and policies or is not leading to changes that improve the lives of the DoD community. Sample members who took a survey should be sent an email, thanking them for their participation and providing a summary report and/or abstract containing the survey results. The ISSCC recommends also sending an email to non-responders that provides a summary report and/or abstract so they can see that results are being used to drive change and asking them to complete future surveys that they receive. Communications to a sample member in a future survey should contain results from previous surveys.
- The applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office should consider, as part of its review and licensing requirements, the communication of survey results and the ensuing actions taken. Survey sponsors who have not used or communicated results from previous survey administrations may be required to use or communicate past results in order to obtain or maintain approval of future surveys.

10. Standardize requirements for surveys in support of student research.

- Students often develop surveys they would like to administer to DoD populations in support of educational degree requirements. However, these surveys may not have been approved in accordance with DoD and Military Department regulations, burden DoD members and their families, and gather data that are potentially embarrassing to DoD and the Military Departments. In an environment already overburdened with surveys, allowing students to conduct surveys of DoD populations in support of an academic degree exacerbates the problem. Often, students develop these proposed surveys based on course or degree requirements rather than the need, of DoD or the Military Departments. In addition, many do so without much involvement from their instructor(s); thus, their surveys require in-depth reviews from the DoD or the Military Departments' survey offices, which are already short-staffed.
- Participating in a student's survey for an academic degree could also potentially discourage members and their families from participating in other official, DoD and Military Department surveys, further reducing response rates. While a DoD or Military Department survey sponsor is a current requirement according to DoD Manual 8910.01, Volume 1, this can lead to "sponsor shopping," where a student petitions potential sponsors until they find one who agrees. New guidelines will be proposed by the ISSCC to help clarify the roles and responsibilities of DoD survey sponsors, including describing the process to ensure the data are actionable and will be appropriately used, and procedures required before a survey can be administered.

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2 COMPLIANCE

Recommendations

2.1	<p>Empower the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office as the screening gateway for <u>all</u> DoD and Military Department surveys of a single Component with: 1) more than 100 DoD members or their families per year; or 2) vulnerable populations (e.g., minors); or 3) sensitive topics (e.g., gender relations, discrimination, UCMJ violations) to improve tracking of survey burden. The applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office will provide review and approval, or recommendation for approval, if appropriate. In addition, the ISSCC-member Survey Office can determine if the survey is exempt from formal review or whether it needs to be reviewed in accordance with applicable DoD or Military Department policies. These reviews are not required for administrations of surveys that have a current DoD or Military Department survey license or OMB clearance number.</p>							
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Burden</th><th style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Cost</th><th style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Duplication</th><th style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Data Quality</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">✓</td><td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">✓</td><td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">✓</td><td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">✓</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality	✓	✓	✓
Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality					
✓	✓	✓	✓					
Action Office(s): USD(P&R), Military Department M&RAs								
2.2	<p>For surveys administered that are not in compliance with applicable DoD or Military Department policies, the appropriate ISSCC-member Survey Office will report the failure to comply with regulations to USD(P&R) or their Military Department M&RA, as well as their Information Management Control Officer (IMCO) and WHS. At the discretion of the ISSCC-member Survey Office, survey sponsoring policy offices may be allowed up to 30 days to bring a survey into compliance. For those found not to be in compliance, the ISSCC-member Survey Office may recommend to USD(P&R) or their Military Department M&RA, their IMCO, or WHS issuance of cease-and-desist orders, destruction of collected data, and/or restriction of noncompliant organizations from future survey data collections.</p>							
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Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality					
✓	✓	✓						
Action Office(s): USD(P&R), Military Department M&RAs, ISSCC								
2.3	<p>Revise DoDI 8910.01, DoD Manual 8910.01, and DoDI 1100.13 to more clearly define review and approval requirements, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all applicable stakeholders, in the licensing of DoD and Military Department information collections defined as surveys.</p>							
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Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality					
✓	✓	✓						
Action Office(s): DoD CIO, WHS, ISSCC								

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Background

According to DoDI 8910.01, information collections, including surveys, must be approved and assigned either a Component or DoD internal information collection report control symbol. Although most DoD policy offices adhere to applicable licensing requirements, some survey sponsors are unaware of them, feel they do not apply to their survey, or in some cases, are unwilling to comply with the regulations. As a result, the number of surveys being conducted, some with poor methodologies and duplicate content, is increasing the burden on military members, their families, and DoD civilian employees. While some who conduct DoD surveys obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) or other approval for conducting human subjects' research, they may not be aware that DoD and the Military Departments require additional steps to obtain survey approval.

DoD and Military Department guidance in DoDI 8910.01 and DoD Manual 8910.01, as well as the DoDI 1100.13, does not currently:

1. Define all survey types that require a license.
2. Define whether a report control symbol or survey control number indicates formal approval of the survey's policy and technical standards or simply that the appropriate authority is aware of the survey.
3. Define the roles and responsibilities of the applicable approval authorities.
4. Identify sanctions for surveys administered without applicable licensing.

Consequently, surveys are approved and licensed based on variations set by DoD and the Military Departments, resulting in ambiguous policies and procedures across the Department.

By establishing each of the ISSCC-member Survey Offices as the main gateway for surveys, and specifying consequences for non-compliance (i.e., notification of senior officials), DoD and the Military Departments will improve their ability to more accurately track and monitor the burden being placed on the DoD community. To improve monitoring and tracking of surveys, the ISSCC Tiger Team recommends that every survey meeting the criteria in Recommendation 2.1 should be submitted to the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office to determine whether it requires additional review and approval in accordance with DoDI 8910.01 and other applicable policies. Subsequently, the ISSCC will begin working with other DoD stakeholders to address the following:

1. Revise issuances, such as the DoDI 8910.01, DoD Manual 8910.01, Volumes 1 and 2, and DoDI 1100.13, to clarify policies and procedures relating to survey review, approval, and licensing.
2. Clarify DoD and Military Department roles and responsibilities as they relate to surveys, including the Chief Information Officer (CIO), IMCOs, WHS, and the ISSCC.
3. Clearly define the types of surveys requiring survey review and approval, and those exempt from licensing (e.g., administered to fewer than 100 military members or government employees).

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3 SURVEY PANELS

Recommendation

3.1	Conduct a feasibility study to develop an online survey panel of Active Duty and Reserve Component Members, as well as DoD Civilians, who agree to participate in selected surveys over a pre-determined time period.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
		✓		✓
Action Office(s): USD(P&R), ISSCC				

Background

Due to reduced response rates, DoD surveys have needed increasingly large sample sizes, each independently selected, which increases cost and burden. The development of an online survey panel of members who agree to participate in multiple surveys would reduce the number of members contacted, provide data more quickly to policy offices, and increase response rates. In addition, repeating the same questions over time could strengthen claims of program effectiveness and enable assessment of question reliability. The panel would consist of members representing key demographics such as rank, career field, and geographic location to ensure an accurate snapshot of the population. Participation would be voluntary and participants could cease participation at any time. To maintain demographic integrity, new participants would be invited as necessary. This initiative would be similar to other government and private sector online survey panels, providing a demographically representative, timely method to ensure accurate survey results with reduced burden and perhaps cost. Because a survey panel within a military environment poses challenges that are different from those in non-military environments, the ISSCC Tiger Team recommends a feasibility study to determine how best to construct a panel and barriers that need to be addressed to ensure its success.

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4 PRE-COORDINATION OF SURVEYS PRIOR TO FUNDING

Recommendation

4.1	Draft a Department-wide letter, coordinated with DoD and Military Department leadership, to major funding organizations requesting advance coordination/notification with the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office prior to award of DoD funding for research that includes surveys or focus groups.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
   				
Action Office(s): USD(P&R), Military Department M&RAs, ISSCC				

Background

DoD funding and contracting organizations may provide funding for research that includes the administration of surveys and focus groups to DoD personnel and their families. However, the awarding of this funding is rarely coordinated with the applicable DoD or Military Department Survey Office. The award and obligation of funds make disapproving and/or modifying surveys more difficult, even in cases when the survey is a duplication of effort, contains sensitive topics, is poorly designed, or is being administered to an overly large sample. Advance coordination/notification is needed before funding is awarded for surveys or focus groups with military or DoD personnel or their families.

The ISSCC Tiger Team recommends that DoD funding and contracting organizations submit proposals' involving surveys or focus groups to the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office before funding is awarded. This "pre-coordination" will allow input into the proposed survey/focus group while there is still time to influence the proposal; advance coordination will help determine whether data currently exist, the sample size is appropriate, and the survey topic(s) are justifiable. If the funding is then awarded, final survey review and licensing would occur as it does now through existing procedures.

The Department-wide letter will include an advisory that the award of funding should include a statement in the approving documents that the award does not constitute approval of the survey or focus groups. In support of this recommendation, the ISSCC will coordinate with the applicable policy offices to develop a comprehensive list of DoD and Military Department funding organizations and their points of contact.

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5 ONE-SURVEY SOLUTION

Recommendation

5.1	Conduct a DoD-wide proof of concept “one-survey solution.” Design and administer a survey of military spouses across the Department utilizing the existing Active Duty or Reserve Survey of Military Spouses that contains a core set of questions for all Military Departments and a limited set of tailored Military Department-specific questions.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓	✓	

Action Office(s): USD(P&R), Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) and Military Department Counterparts, ISSCC

Background

Although ISSCC member organizations have placed greater emphasis on coordination and collaboration between their survey programs, surveys with similar content continue to be fielded to the same populations, resulting in duplication, cost, and burden across the Department. DHA has taken the lead to address this issue by working with the Military Departments to develop the Joint Outpatient Experience Survey (JOES), a survey intended to provide a consolidated Tri-Service outpatient experience tool and data collection methodology for measuring beneficiaries' perspectives on their recent outpatient care. This centralized and integrated methodology resulted in a core set of topics and questions that are asked of the entire sample and Military Department-specific questions asked of sample members from each military branch. The ISSCC will extend this approach to a large-scale random sample survey administered on a regular basis to military spouses. The goal will be to demonstrate that a single spouse survey can meet the survey needs of both the DoD and Military Departments.

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6 CENTRALIZED SURVEY CALENDAR AND DATA REPOSITORY

Recommendation

6.1	Develop a centralized calendar and website containing officially approved surveys and their planned fielding schedules, including DoD and Military Department survey questionnaires, data tabulations, and reports. The website will serve as a repository of information and data collected by DoD and Military Department survey programs.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓	✓	
	Action Office: ISSCC			

Background

Department policymakers and analysts who need DoD survey data to make decisions and evaluate their programs face difficulties because:

- There is no central source for reliable and validated human capital data, including surveys.
- Data required for these analyses are "defined, owned, and controlled" by multiple organizations across the enterprise – gaining access and release authority often takes longer than the actual analysis time.
- Much of the data must be handled with special care to protect personally identifiable information (PII) and protected health information (PHI).
- Achieving consistent definitions, uses, metrics, and knowledge transfer of the data has proven difficult.
- A majority of funding/analyst time for studies is spent on data access, cleansing, and knowledge transfer that add little real value to decision-makers.
- Completed studies and lessons learned from previous data analysis may be overlooked or not readily available, which limits opportunities to share information.

The lack of a centralized repository that stores and maintains tabulations, questionnaires, and reports provides little transparency of existing surveys or DoD data. A centralized survey data repository, similar to Data.gov, introduces an integrated solution to significantly enhance access to DoD manpower and personnel survey data, and move the Department to more of a self-service and collaborative environment, allowing those who need such data to access and analyze it quickly and with a minimum of assistance required.

Phase 1 of the website provides access to ISSCC members only and went online in 2015; the website currently maintains survey information across the ISSCC Survey Offices, as well as a calendar to track survey field periods of large scale DoD and Military Department surveys. Phase 2 of the website would provide access to DoD personnel via Common Access Card (CAC) with enhanced calendar/scheduling features. Phase 3 would provide limited access to the public and include survey datasets with individually identifying information removed.

Department of Defense
Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) – Tiger Team
DoD Survey Burden Action Plan

7 INCENTIVES

Recommendation

7.1	Investigate feasibility and legality of the use of incentives for survey and focus group participants to standardize policy and allowable amounts across the Department.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
				✓
	Action Office(s): OGC, ISSCC			

Background

To combat the decline in survey response rates, non-DoD organizations often use financial or similar incentives (e.g., gift cards) to encourage participation. There is currently mixed guidance across the Department regarding the use of incentives for DoD surveys. Some legal reviews have ruled against incentives based on regulations prohibiting dual compensation, while others have permitted them. RAND was allowed by DoD's Office of General Counsel to offer a \$4 unconditional incentive to complete a non-response follow-up survey to the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study (RMWS), stating in its ruling that the incentive was "not compensation" and the RMWS non-response survey could be completed on-duty.

Similarly, DMDC received a legal opinion from the Defense Human Resources Activity's (DHRA's) counsel that incentives were permitted on DoD surveys. However, the Army Research Institute (ARI) has received guidance that incentives are not permissible as part of a survey's administration. In addition, OMB has set ceilings on the value of incentives for previously approved DoD surveys and focus groups based on a number of factors. As a result, the ISSCC will request a Department-wide legal ruling on the use of incentives for DoD surveys. If incentives are permissible, the ISSCC will develop appropriate guidelines for the use of incentives on DoD and Military Department surveys and coordinate with OMB Desk Officers and Statisticians to ensure it aligns with OMB regulations for public collections.

Department of Defense
Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) – Tiger Team
DoD Survey Burden Action Plan

8 MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Recommendation

8.1	Research and pilot test the use of mobile survey technology for DoD and Military Department surveys.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓		✓
	Action Office(s): ISSCC			

Background

With the continued rise in mobile technology and the expected upward trends in Internet usage on such devices, the use of mobile devices creates a viable mode for survey data collection that the Department should examine. While the commercial survey industry continues to expand the use of mobile phones and tablets to administer surveys, DoD and the Military Departments have been slower to explore these capabilities.

The digital age offers survey researchers the alternative of electronically collecting data through a variety of technology platforms such as a mobile phone, electronic portable device, tablet, etc., which can greatly improve the turnaround time for survey return and efficiency of data processing and analysis. Moreover, a mobile survey environment is particularly ideal for a survey administered over an extended period to allow analysts to monitor the progress of respondents' participation in real time. The use of a mobile device such as a smartphone for survey purposes is appealing given it has similar capabilities of a personal computer but is more versatile in terms of size, portability, and mode of communication. These technologies also have greater appeal to the "millennial generation," the group with the lowest response rates on military surveys.

Although mobile technology offers opportunities to collect survey data, factors that influence a willingness to participate in mobile surveys remain unknown. In the end, the proliferation of new and advanced technology has greatly expanded the mechanisms by which to survey targeted populations, and should be investigated as another data collection tool across the Department.

Department of Defense
Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) – Tiger Team
DoD Survey Burden Action Plan

9 LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COORDINATION

Recommendation

9.1	Request USD(P&R) Legislative Affairs Office notify the Director, DMDC when a survey or focus group is being considered in Congressional legislation. This notification will be shared with the Chair of the ISSCC and its members.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓	✓	
Action Office(s): USD(P&R) Legislative Affairs, ISSCC				

Background

Congress may require new DoD surveys and focus groups through legislation contained in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). However, ISSCC-member Survey Offices may become aware of the requirements after the NDAA has already been finalized, when it is too late to provide input. With earlier awareness into proposed legislation involving surveys, the ISSCC may be able to more effectively shape survey-related legislation so that it does not duplicate existing efforts or unduly burden military members and their families.

Department of Defense
Inter-Service Survey Coordinating Committee (ISSCC) – Tiger Team
DoD Survey Burden Action Plan

10 ONGOING SURVEY BURDEN TIGER TEAM

Recommendation

10.1	Task and resource the Survey Burden Tiger Team as an ongoing effort of the ISSCC. The Tiger Team will provide regular updates to USD(P&R) and Military Department M&RAs on the effectiveness and efficiencies of recommendations implemented, as well as provide new recommendations for consideration.			
	Burden	Cost	Duplication	Data Quality
	✓	✓	✓	✓
Action Office(s): USD(P&R), Military Department M&RAs, ISSCC				

Background

While USD(P&R's) tasking of the Tiger Team, and its development of an Action Plan to address issues related to survey duplication, cost, and burden across the Department is an important initial step, there is much left to accomplish. Many ideas from this Tiger Team will take months or years to fully implement and without monitoring and tracking, things will not get done. This effort should not be viewed as a one-time solution, but instead as an ongoing effort that will evolve based on a changing survey environment. The Tiger Team will develop metrics to measure survey burden across the Department. These metrics will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tiger Team's current and future recommendations.

While recognizing budget constraints will continue to exist and cost-cutting measures will be strictly enforced, tasking and resourcing an ongoing Tiger Team will ensure the Department continues to develop ideas and recommendations that help curb the burden and cost of surveys. In order to facilitate the work on the ongoing Tiger Team, it is recommended that DoD and the Military Departments adequately resource the initiatives included in this Action Plan and fund travel for its members to attend on-site meetings. This would help transform the ISSCC from being a survey coordination committee to an entity better able to govern the complex world of DoD and Military Department surveys. Given the many millions of dollars in direct and indirect costs that DoD and the Military Departments expend on surveys and focus groups, a reduction in burden, cost, and duplication provided by a more impactful ISSCC Tiger Team would save the Department significant funds.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

ID	Recommendation	Action Office(s)
1.1	Establish consistent standards that apply to DoD and Military Department surveys.	ISSCC
2.1	Empower the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office as the screening gateway for all DoD and Military Department surveys of a single Component with: 1) more than 100 DoD members or their families per year; or 2) vulnerable populations (e.g., minors); or 3) sensitive topics (e.g., gender relations, discrimination, UCMJ violations) to improve tracking of survey burden. The applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office will provide review and approval, or recommendation for approval, if appropriate. In addition, the ISSCC-member Survey Office can determine if the survey is exempt from formal review or whether it needs to be reviewed in accordance with applicable DoD or Military Department policies. These reviews are not required for administrations of surveys that have a current DoD or Military Department survey license or OMB clearance number.	USD(P&R) Military Department M&RAs
2.2	For surveys administered that are not in compliance with applicable DoD or Military Department policies, the appropriate ISSCC-member Survey Office will report the failure to comply with regulations to USD(P&R) or their Military Department M&RA, as well as their Information Management Control Officer (IMCO) and WHS. At the discretion of the ISSCC-member Survey Office, survey sponsoring policy offices may be allowed up to 30 days to bring a survey into compliance. For those found not to be in compliance, the ISSCC-member Survey Office may recommend to USD(P&R) or their Military Department M&RA, their IMCO, or WHS issuance of cease-and-desist orders, destruction of collected data, and/or restriction of noncompliant organizations from future survey data collections.	USD(P&R) Military Department M&RAs ISSCC
2.3	Revise DoDI 8910.01, DoD Manual 8910.01, and DoDI 1100.13 to more clearly define review and approval requirements, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all applicable stakeholders, in the licensing of DoD and Military Department information collections defined as surveys.	DoD CIO WHS ISSCC
3.1	Conduct a feasibility study to develop an online survey panel of Active Duty and Reserve Component Members, as well as DoD Civilians, who agree to participate in selected surveys over a pre-determined time period.	USD(P&R) ISSCC

ID	Recommendation	Action Office(s)
4.1	Draft a Department-wide letter, coordinated with DoD and Military Department leadership, to major funding organizations requesting advance coordination/notification with the applicable ISSCC-member Survey Office prior to award of DoD funding for research that includes surveys or focus groups.	USD(P&R) Military Department M&RAs ISSCC
5.1	Conduct a DoD-wide proof of concept “one-survey solution.” Design and administer a survey of military spouses across the Department utilizing the existing Active Duty or Reserve Survey of Military Spouses that contains a core set of questions for all Military Departments and a limited set of tailored Military Department-specific questions.	USD(P&R) MC&FP/Military Department Counterparts ISSCC
6.1	Develop a centralized calendar and website containing officially approved surveys and their planned fielding schedules, including DoD and Military Department survey questionnaires, data tabulations, and reports. The website will serve as a repository of information and data collected by DoD and Military Department survey programs.	ISSCC
7.1	Investigate feasibility and legality of the use of incentives for survey and focus group participants to standardize policy and allowable amounts across the Department.	OGC ISSCC
8.1	Research and pilot test the use of mobile survey technology for DoD and Military Department surveys.	ISSCC
9.1	Request USD(P&R) Legislative Affairs Office notify the Director, DMDC when a survey or focus group is being considered in Congressional legislation. This notification will be shared with the Chair of the ISSCC and its members.	USD(P&R) LA ISSCC
10.1	Task and resource the Survey Burden Tiger Team as on ongoing effort of the ISSCC. The Tiger Team will provide regular updates to USD(P&R) and Military Department M&RAs on the effectiveness and efficiencies of recommendations implemented, as well as provide new recommendations for consideration.	USD(P&R) Military Department M&RAs ISSCC